
California Native Plants in the Central Valley

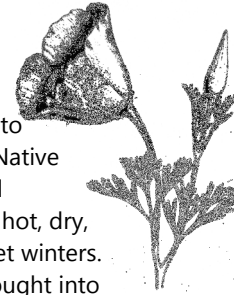


"What gorgeous opportunity California has to work out a unique style of landscape gardening based upon her native trees, shrubs, vines and flowers. It is one of the richest spots on the earth's surface in variety of plants worth cultivating for their beauty..... people of California must realize that there is something more refined than miles of scarlet geraniums, acres of callas and millions of crotons and cannas...which make California seem an imitation of other lands.

--Wilhelm Miller, 1913

What are Native Plants?

California native plants are those that grew here prior to the settlement of Europeans. These plants have evolved and adapted to the changing California climate. Native plants in our area have developed mechanisms for withstanding the hot, dry, rainless summers and the cool, wet winters. They've incorporated periodic drought into their survival mechanisms.



Native plants are not often appreciated for use in the landscape. The widespread use of plants from other parts of the world has influenced generations of people accustomed to landscapes that cannot survive a month without water.

Happily there is a growing awareness that we must be conservative with our natural resources. Some homeowners are discovering the beauty and practical nature of native plants. Bringing a bit of California back into California gardens can be an antidote to our urban and suburban living.

Why Use Native Plants?

Save water. Species of plants local to your area survive naturally with only winter rains. Once established in the garden, these plants require minimal to no irrigation. Saving water is of vital importance to everyone.

Lower Maintenance. Native vegetation is at home in your local climate and soil. Plants in any maintained garden require some attention, but with natives, you will use less water and little to no fertilizer. They will then require less pruning and less time, and still look their best.

Minimize use of Pesticides. Native plants have developed defenses against native pests, and are frequently, though not completely, resistant to non-native pests, too. Thus you can rely less on pesticides, or learn to rely on less toxic pesticides.

Enjoy the Real California. Your surroundings are part of your life in California. We have a tremendous range of native vegetation that is absolute California. Most manmade landscapes in California are examples of gardens from other parts of the world. Display California's beautiful and natural identity in your landscape by using native plants.

Support Local Ecology. As cities continue to expand, the natural habitat is being reduced. To balance this development, we can plant native vegetation in our yards and encourage the planting of natives in gardens, parks, and roadways. This does not replace lost habitat but it can provide extensions to nearby remaining natural wild places. By planting a native Coffeeberry instead of a Holly, you will provide food for local native wildlife.



For Beauty's Sake. California natives are colorful, fragrant, and attractive. They move through the cycles of the seasons in perfect harmony. Annual wildflowers burst into spring. Summer and autumn bring rich colors of amber, green, gray, russet, and brown. Cool winter days bring acorns and bright berries. Take time to appreciate the colors, textures, and smells that are natural to our climate and seasons.

Attract Native Wildlife. Many of the best plants for attracting hummingbirds, butterflies, and other wildlife are the native plants that they have used for thousands of years. Native plants attract the beneficial insects that help with keeping the garden healthy and in balance, reducing pesticide use. Invite your favorite species by planting their favorite natives.



"At some point, I hope the question "Why use natives?" becomes obsolete, that gardeners will no longer think they must choose between having an "environmentally correct" garden and a beautiful one. Instead, they will opt for both...and embrace the artistry and restorative aspects of gardening in harmony with nature.

--Carol Bornstein, from "Thoughts on Gardening with Native Plants" in the January 2001 issue of Fremontia

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Where are native plants found?

“As the years went by it was with deep regret that I saw the wildflowers disappearing from the landscape”
-- Theodore Payne



Viewing

You can visit a demonstration garden to see how native plants can work in a landscape setting. Intermountain Nursery in Prather has 12 gardens with a self-guided tour. Clovis Botanical Garden in Clovis has a large selection of natives and other drought tolerant plants in a landscape-like setting.



Take a hike! Organizations such as the California Native Plant Society, the San Joaquin River Parkway Trust, and the Sierra Foothill Conservancy conduct hikes and educational trips through areas with native plants.

Buying

- The annual Sequoia Chapter Fall Native Plant sale is held in autumn. Visit www.cnps-sequoia.org for details.
- Nurseries specializing in or selling native plants.
 - Intermountain Nursery, Prather (specialize)
 - Many Fresno/Clovis nurseries sell some natives. Just ask! Grandma’s Nursery, Evergreen Nursery, H&E, Riverside Nursery, Western Sierra Nursery (Oakhurst)
- Native plant seed resources
 - Lerner Seeds <www.lernerseeds.com>
 - Theodore Payne Foundation <www.theodorepayne.org>
 - Elkhorn Nursery <www.elkhornnursery.com>
 - Hedgerow Farms <www.hedgerowfarms.com>



Helping

The California Native Plant Society is engaged in the work of ensuring that California’s native flora is preserved. This is done “...through monitoring of rare and endangered plants, education, publicity, and on occasion, legal action.” Support these efforts by joining CNPS. Visit www.cnps.org for membership information.

Do not collect from the wild

Collecting plants is illegal on most public land in California, unless a permit is obtained. Instead, visit a nursery or contact the Native Plant Society. Members routinely share plants and seeds from their personal gardens.



Reading and Learning

Here are some excellent “starter” resources as you increase your knowledge of native plants.

- The Bookstore link at www.cnps.org
 - Growing California Native Plants (Marjorie Schmidt)
 - Gardening with a Wild Heart (Judith Lowry)
 - Trees and Shrubs of California (J. Stuart & J. Sawyer)
 - The Wild Lawn Handbook (Stevie Daniels)
 - California Native Plants for the Garden (Bornstein, Fross, O’Brien)
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- www.cnps.org (CA Native Plant Society)
 - www.cnga.org (CA Native Grass Association)
 - www.calflora.com (plant database)
 - www.growingnative.com (plant perspectives)
 - www.laspilitas.com (nursery & educational)
 - www.calphoto.com (wildflower sightings)
 - www.renyswildflowers.com (plant search)

Bringing natives into your garden



There is a growing awareness of the value of bringing natives into our personal gardens. This is sometimes called “backyard restoration” and is happening throughout the country. It’s the idea of appreciating your region’s landscape and bringing it back home.

In California, we are blessed with a tremendous variety from which to choose. Natives that thrive in the Central Valley are especially impressive and put us back in touch with the natural world in which we live.

In every garden, the right environment (sun, soil, water, etc.) must be found or created for your plants to grow. Once established, the environment and plants require maintenance. Growing natives is no exception, but differences exist in the details.

When to plant?



The ideal time to plant natives is in the autumn or early winter. You can plant in the spring if you watch them carefully and give them what they need when they need it (sun, drainage, water). However, don’t expect them to settle in until after the next winter. If you plant in warmer spring weather, do it in the late evening when the sun is setting and give them a good watering to be ready for the next day.

Where to plant?



Plant natives next to other plants that have similar sun, water, soil, and drainage needs. Since most natives don’t want much water, think hard about this before putting them next to a regularly watered plant. And don’t plant them too close together. You will be surprised how quickly a year or two has passed when you realize that your small native shrub is filling what used to be a big, open space.

How much water and when?



Once established, they need little water and not very often. For the first two years, natives do best if watered weekly during the dry periods. Once established, water needs can vary. Most do well with occasional water to keep them looking nice. Others thrive with more water, and a few, such as Fremontia and some Ceanothus, tolerate only the natural winter rains. In the summer, water in the early morning or evening when it’s cooler – not in the middle of a hot day.

When to prune?



Natives need pruning only once a year. One of the reasons pruning of non-native landscape plants is required is because they are given lots of water and fertilizer. Without these two growth enhancers, your natives will typically require a pruning once per year to shape them. Do this when the plant is dormant. Shrubs can also be pruned after they have finished blooming.

No fertilizer!



There are many reasons to limit or eliminate the use of fertilizers. The biggest reason for natives is that they don’t really like the taste of fertilizer. Save money, save time, save labor, keep the water supply untainted – abandon the use of fertilizer!

Keeping natives healthy

Mulch is excellent for keeping native plants healthy and thriving through the summer months. In addition to keeping the plant’s roots cool in the summer, it also adds organic matter to the soil. Use hardwood mulch (like almond) and be sure to leave the trunk and root crown free of mulch. Don’t use straw because you can easily import weed seeds if you are not sure where the straw was obtained.

Getting Started

Spring and summer can be seasons when you plan for where you want to plant natives. Become familiar with where water accumulates or drains in your landscape. In the summer, monitor which parts of your yard are in sun all day and which areas get partial or total shade.

In early autumn, attend a native plant sale or a nursery that sells native plants. There you can talk with knowledgeable persons who can advise you.

Consider the possibilities of flowering plants, aromatic plants, and plants that attract hummingbirds and butterflies. You can also plant natives in rock gardens and containers.

Here is a list to get you started:



Trees: Valley Oak, Coast Live Oak, Sycamore, Desert Willow

Large shrubs: Western Redbud, Toyon, Coffeeberry, Fremontia, Blue Elderberry

Small to medium shrubs: Carpenteria, Bush Poppy, Purple Sage, Cleveland Sage, Coyote Bush, Buckwheat, Ceanothus, Coffeeberry, Wild roses, Manzanita, Bush Lupine

Lower growing perennials: Brodiaeas (Blue Dicks, Harvest Brodiaea) Blue Eyed Grass, Douglas iris, California Fuchsia, Yarrow, California Poppies, Foothill Penstemon, Western Flax, Coral Bells

Native grasses: Deergrass, Purple, Nodding, and Foothill Needlegrass, California Fescue, Blue Wild Rye, California Melic. Native rushes and sedges are excellent around ponds.

Thanks to CNPS Sequoia Chapter members for their expertise.

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